



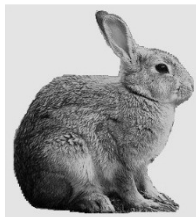
Left Behind

Colm Scully

Smithereens Press

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Smithereens Press 11

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is first published by Smithereens Press

<http://smithereenspress.com>

on 10th October 2014.

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Cover image: 'Blue Like Mars', courtesy of NASA.

Text set in Calibri 12 point.

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Left Behind

Ghost

Row upon row of pipe-work flexing muscle,
tendons of the empty factory shell.
Down clean-room corridors in silence,
arteries to the vessels at the heart.
That's where the boys geared up for night shift,
beard masks and hard hats, acid suit and boots.
That's where they charged the dark blue glass reactors,
chill in the quiet evenings making cures.
That was the admin block, the empty hallways,
pictures in open offices of kids at home.
The work, the sweat, the energy exuded,
long since deserted desks piled high with books.
The boardroom looks out over a tarnished tank farm,
the cast down eyes of a collapsed venetian blind.

Home

Pink roses on a high hedge,
planted by my father,
last through summer.
Peonies flush deep red,
the stems grow heavy with flower in June.
Within days they are weighed down,
petals float to the grass.
He took the bulbs from his mother's garden in the sixties.

Two cherry trees,
pulled, roots intact, from their birthplace
by one of the first four wheel drives,
replanted here to bloom each spring for twenty years.
One rotted in the shade of the thirty foot Scots Pines.
We planted two hundred one winter's morning,
my father lying in the hospital.
Now they hide the view over the valley,
shelter the house from the road's sound.

In May St Joseph Lilies, his favourites,
grow long tall stalks.
Cold green-white baby buds
bow their fragile heads, blessing the scene.
He guarded them, his prize,
against trespassing dogs
wilful children running over beds
and the wind.

Come Sunday

Come Sunday we will gather
in the hills, Upstate.
Friends and neighbours merging off the highway,
parking our Oldsmobiles in polite lines.

Where the bramble bushes flower,
under the ash trees, we discard our clothes.
Carry our bags and tents across river,
higher to some old cabins out of sight.

Warm bellied sun shines on our torsos,
wind in our tonsils, laughing at bad jokes.
Down dry pathways, beside small rivers,
moving in twos and threes, in flip flopped feet.

‘What’s that kiddo? See, in the bright sunlight.’
Glistening silver trout on the water’s edge.
‘Dang it’s gone.’ Just in a moment,
naked shadow passing beneath the bridge.

The Old King

after 'The Old King' by Picasso

He hangs in the Crawford.
fifty years to the day,
back turned to Emmet place
and the hip marble fronts of Opera Lane.
His apple browns and dull reds
fading always
since that first stroke in Antibes.
His pale lips and frilly collar,
baubled hat and rosy eyes.
A grisly old fool on a throne.
His silly smile
masking a rotten core.

Have you forgotten

'Have you forgotten,
what it was to be young?
How did you spend it?
Were you the pasty faced city boy
or did you spend it
slogging apples and building rafts,
fishing in the summer?'

You know where I was.
Sitting at the window, looking out at the rain.
Reading next year's schoolbook
on the first day of holidays.
Walking past my cousins playing soccer,
being asked to play,
saying no.

And why do you ask now?
Do you think you have an edge on me still?
I don't hear you jibe or imply.
Perhaps sometimes you're not quite sure
about things yourself
anymore?

Pharmaceutical Plant

The nice young man brings us to the analyser,
past product lines with unpronounceable names,
Tumerseron,
Atalvastatyl,
Quiripin Hydrochlorin,
Names concocted on the backs of A4 pads
in some soft seated laboratory back office,
under medical advice.

The reactors are empty now,
no underlying hum of compressed air or steam.
Valves sit redundant on unused pipes
that once decided on where the flow would go,
on which tank filled or emptied.
We walk past polished centrifuges into control rooms
that bustled with the business of making
the world's most potent drugs,
while talk of GAA and everyday occurrence
kept tedium at bay.

'No need to worry about the gloves and glasses'
says Ger the electrician,
the last official worker.
When he clocks in, he says, it's like a ghost is entering on the scene
to wander around the fifteen acre site,
haunting corridors and corners,
taunting the memories:

The shifts that never spoke for years over a stolen sandwich.
The unreported incidents and spillages.
The operator caught fishing off the pier, naked.
The day the ninety meter cubed blew up.
The guys who broke the hundred grand
doing forty hours overtime a week.
The treblers and doublers.
The 'job and knock'.
The batch that burst the disc and sprayed the roof,
it took five days to clean up.
The canteen food.
The lives that grumbled and gave out
but only lived for coming in the gate,
and those that hated every second they spent
within this place.
The threatened strikes.
The barbecue nights.
The wine reception where the new GM got sozzled with the rest
and sang Amhrán na bhFiann (though he was Swiss).
The comradeship, the hope.
The buzz towards the end.
The characters.
The nicknames;
Hatchet, Player, Ten to Two, The Lord.

Ger's chatter casts across me as I dream.
'This way lads' he says, and leads us on.
He marks the time sheet.
We disconnect the analyser we've come to salvage
and spirit off to our own plant.
What's left behind, depreciated down to zero
on some bondholder's bank book in New York,
owed twenty times and never paid.

And shadows of the workers' lives,
the million hours spent
to enrich capital,
to sustain living,
to count down days.

Passage

Deeper and deeper they journeyed
into an unknown future,
hindered by the baggage of ten billion pasts.
Their ship slowed
to a deathly stop,
while all within lay dreaming
of endless progress.

After the humans

Empty wine barrels and an empty press.
Soldiers' guns sitting in their slots.
Cardboard boxes flapping in the wind.
Cars parked neatly in the tree shade to keep them cool.
School uniforms, pressed and hanging, await September.
Coiled up hoses in garden sheds, and fussily prepared dinners frozen in fridges.
Guard dogs waiting to be unchained.

Children's playgrounds remain empty.
The wind catches a swing.
The gentle creak of the chains can once again be heard
by animals, foraging in bins for the last of the processed food.

Hedgerows grow messy and uncut.
Gaudy yellow houses stand harmlessly in estates.
Satellite dishes automatically move to find a signal,
then become still once more.

The vaccine factory has a half completed order,
sitting in the warehouse yard partly wrapped.
The truck is waiting, its curtain drawn back.

Gargoyles stare down from church buttresses into vacant courtyards.
The posters for the pageant are made up.
They sit in rolls in the art director's office.

The little chapel on the island is silent all year around.

A family of pine martens nests in the bell tower.

Cobwebs still gather in corners.

The Bible on the pulpit is open at Saint Paul.

A new gravestone is half etched

-In memory of-

The plastic rosettes remain bright and shiny,
cleaned by the rain.

The timber crucifix is dated, but has fallen to one side.

A Leprechaun ponders by the headstone for a moment, then moves
away.

Flags fly in the cold night air.

The temperature of the earth is beginning to stabilise.

Ring of white anthers on a Ribwort Plantain

Last night I dreamt of Mother Earth.
How it must have been
to live on the first home.
Before red giant, white dwarf and death,
before diaspora.

I've watched the film footage from those days
but some things only dreams can show.
A child plucking soldiers from a hedge,
meadow-sweet in the air,
going nowhere.

Life on Mars

Your pea green body rubs against me.
You are still asleep as I watch sunrise
over Alba Mons.
I heard yesterday that you would leave me
for a human girl half your years.
The dome of the sun clips the horizon,
burning its red rim.

I hear you mumble in your sleep.
I remember I asked
'What do you wish for?'
But your elliptic visions led you astray.
One of their short summers was all it took.
Now I feel guilty,
helping you learn their barbish words.

Or was it the loss of tenderness in my touch.
Was I the first to stop locking noses
before you'd leave for evening shift on the ice caps.
I look for a way
to recapture that alien heart,
to re-fire our dying love.

A silver bead of sweat runs down your face.
I want to wipe it dry,
to trace my palm across the creases of your neck,
fold my fingers through the vortex of your gland.

But my skin has grown warm and it's time to get dressed.
I count the moons and watch the stars fading.
It glitters in the distance.
Sometimes I wonder,
is that planet cursed?

'Tell me something about Earth' I'd say.
'You'd hate the shorter days' you replied.
The dry white whispers
faded to nothing.
I watch the night exit.
Love can die anywhere.

Acknowledgements

‘After the Humans’ appeared as ‘Ten Tomorrows No.8’ in *Cyphers* 74. ‘Life on Mars’ was shortlisted for the Ó Bhéal Five Word International Poetry Competition 2014. A number of these poems, or versions of, are due for publication in *What News*, *Centurions*, the author’s forthcoming debut collection from New Binary Press.



Colm Scully has had work published in various magazines including *Cyphers*, *Abridged*, and *Burning Bush Two*, and has been shortlisted/commended in a number of competitions. He has been a guest reader around Ireland, and in Coventry as part of the Twinned City Cultural Exchange 2011. He won The Cúirt New Writing Poetry Prize 2014, and was selected for the

Poetry Ireland Introductions Series 2014. He has made a poetry film and is collaborating on a second.

Colm is from Cork, where he lives with his wife and three children. His first full collection is forthcoming in late 2014 from New Binary Press.



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